

Listing of Claims:

1. - 38. (Canceled).

39. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) A method for ~~the~~ diafiltration of a product, which comprises the steps of:

- (a) providing a product stream that consists of the product;
- (b) providing a first fluid stream that consists of a wash fluid that is external to the product;
- (c) providing a second fluid stream that comprises a permeate derived from the product itself;
- (d) supplying the first and second fluid streams to the product stream ~~in~~ such a way that the product stream is diluted by the two fluid streams;
- (e) feeding the product stream diluted with the first and second fluid streams to membrane filtration means; and
- (f) adjusting ~~the~~ a volumetric ratio ~~[[of]]~~ between the two fluid streams with respect to each other, such that a continuously multistage operation is enabled;

wherein the permeate from the membrane filtration means is supplied as the second fluid stream.

40. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 39, wherein the total amount of fluid supplied by the first and second fluid streams is adjusted to a specific value based on a predetermined criteria.

41. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 39, wherein the volumetric ratio of the two fluid streams with respect to each other is automatically adjusted in a closed-loop control system as a function of process parameters measured continuously or at intervals, such that predetermined process parameters are maintained.

42. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 40, wherein the permeate flow of the membrane filtration means is measured, and ~~the~~ a total amount of fluid supplied by the first and second fluid streams is adjusted as a function of the measured permeate flow.

43. (Withdrawn) The method in accordance with claim 39, wherein first and second fluid streams are adjusted independently of each other.

44. (Withdrawn) The method in accordance with claim 39, wherein the product stream is circulated through the membrane filtration means.

45. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 39, wherein ~~the~~ a pressure on ~~the~~ a permeate side of the membrane filtration means is maintained at an essentially constant level, independently of ~~the~~ a total amount of fluid or independently of the volumetric ratio of the two fluid streams with respect to each other.

46. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 39, wherein the product ~~that is~~ being supplied as the product stream ~~has been previously washed~~ is pre-washed in at least one upstream diafiltration process.

47. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 46, wherein the permeate ~~is used as~~ comprises the wash fluid in the at least one upstream diafiltration process.

48. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 47, wherein, in the at least one upstream diafiltration ~~process~~ processes, ~~the amounts a volume~~ of permeate supplied as wash fluid ~~are~~ is adjusted to a specific value, as a function of the amount of permeate produced by the membrane filtration means.

49. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 48, wherein ~~the a~~ pressure on ~~the a~~ permeate side of the membrane filtration means is maintained at a uniform, essentially constant level.

50. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 49, wherein ~~the~~ permeate sides of the membrane filtration means used in the at least one upstream diafiltration ~~process~~ processes or in all of one or more additional diafiltration process of the at least one upstream diafiltration ~~process~~ processes are connected with one another by connecting lines.

51. (Withdrawn - Currently Amended) The method in accordance with claim 46, wherein at least one additional membrane filtration process, is ~~carried out~~ performed upstream of the at least one diafiltration process.

52. (Withdrawn) The method in accordance with claim 39, wherein the product is a fruit juice.

53. (Withdrawn) The method in accordance with claim 52 wherein the fruit juice is drupe juice, berry juice, citrus juice, pineapple juice, grape juice, apple juice, or pear juice.

54. (Currently Amended) A device for carrying out ~~the~~ diafiltration of a product, which comprises:

- (a) membrane filtration means with a product inlet, a product outlet, and a permeate outlet;
- (b) a product supply line for feeding a product stream to the product inlet of the membrane filtration means;
- (c) a wash fluid supply line for feeding a wash fluid stream to the product stream;
- (d) a permeate supply line for feeding a permeate stream derived from the product itself to the product stream; and
- (e) adjusting means for adjusting ~~the~~ a volumetric ratio ~~[[of]]~~ between the wash fluid stream and the permeate stream that are fed to the product

stream to control a viscosity of the permeate stream, such that a
continuously multistage operation is enabled;

wherein the permeate supply line ~~is designed as~~ comprises a permeate
return line for returning permeate from the permeate outlet of the membrane
filtration means to the product stream.

55. (Currently Amended) The device in accordance with claim 54, wherein the adjusting
means are ~~designed~~ configured so that the wash fluid and permeate streams that are supplied ~~can~~
~~be adjusted~~ are adjustable independently of each other.

56. (Currently Amended) The device in accordance with claim 55, wherein the adjusting
means comprise an automatic control system, with which the total amount of fluid, comprising at
least one of the an amount of wash fluid supplied and ~~the an~~ an amount of permeate supplied, ~~and/or~~
~~the and a volumetric~~ ratio of the amount of wash fluid supplied to the amount of permeate
supplied ~~can be~~ is one of automatically adjustable ~~adjusted or and~~ controlled in a closed-loop
control system.

57. (Previously Presented) The device in accordance with claim 54, wherein the product
inlet and product outlet of the membrane filtration means are connected by a circulation pump to
form a product circulation.

58. (Currently Amended) The device in accordance with claim 57, ~~which additionally~~
~~comprises~~ further comprising: a product feed line for feeding ~~[[a]]~~ the product stream to the

product circulation and a product discharge line for discharging ~~[[a]]~~ the product stream from the product circulation.

59. (Previously Presented) The device in accordance with claim 58 wherein the product feed line opens into the product circulation upstream of the product discharge line.

60. (Currently Amended) The device in accordance with claim 59, wherein the product feed line and the product discharge line are arranged in the product circulation in ~~the~~ a region between the product outlet of the membrane filtration means and the circulation pump.

61. (Currently Amended) The device in accordance with claim 60, wherein the wash fluid ~~feed~~ supply line opens into the product circulation in the region between the product outlet of the membrane filtration means and the circulation pump.

62. (Previously Presented) The device in accordance with claim 61, wherein the permeate supply line opens into the product circulation in the region between the product outlet of the filtration means and the circulation pump.

63. (Previously Presented) The device in accordance with claim 62, wherein the wash fluid supply line and the permeate supply line open into the product stream by two separate openings or by a common opening.

64. (Currently Amended) The device in accordance with claim 62, wherein the device is ~~designed in~~ configured ~~such a way such~~ that ~~the a~~ pressure at the permeate outlet of the filtration means is independent of the amounts of wash fluid and permeate that are supplied, so that a change in ~~these~~ amounts of wash fluid and permeate that are supplied do ~~does~~ not cause a change in the pressure at the permeate outlet.

65. (Previously Presented) The device in accordance with claim 64, wherein a permeate pump is installed in the permeate supply line.

66. (Previously Presented) The device in accordance with claim 64, wherein a wash fluid pump is installed in the wash fluid supply line.

67. (Previously Presented) A filtration plant comprising a device in accordance with claim 54.

68. (Currently Amended) The filtration plant wherein one or more additional diafiltration stages are installed upstream of the device in accordance with claim 54, and wherein the filtration plant is ~~designed in~~ configured ~~such a way~~ that the additional diafiltration stages ~~can be supplied~~ are supplyable exclusively with at least one of their own permeate ~~and/or~~ and permeate of ~~the a~~ next downstream diafiltration stage.

69. (Currently Amended) The filtration plant in accordance with claim 68, wherein the additional diafiltration stages have adjusting means, by which the amounts of permeate fed to the individual stages ~~can be adjusted~~ are adjustable.

70. (Currently Amended) The filtration plant in accordance with claim 69, wherein the adjusting means include an automatic control system, with which ~~the~~ a given amount of permeate that is ~~supplied can be~~ automatically ~~adjusted~~ adjustable.

71. (Currently Amended) The filtration plant in accordance with claim 68, wherein ~~the~~ pressures on ~~the~~ permeate sides of ~~the~~ a membrane filtration means of the additional diafiltration stages are independent of ~~the~~ given amounts of permeate that are supplied, so that a change in ~~these~~ the given amounts of permeate that are supplied does not ~~result in any significant~~ cause a change in the pressures on the permeate sides of the membrane filtration means that exceeds a set threshold level.

72. (Currently Amended) The filtration plant in accordance with claim 68, wherein ~~the~~ permeate sides of ~~the~~ a membrane filtration means of the additional diafiltration stages or of all of the diafiltration stages of the filtration plant are connected with one another ~~in such a way~~ that essentially ~~the~~ a same pressure exists on the permeate sides of the membrane filtration means during the multistage operation.

73. (Currently Amended) The filtration plant in accordance with claim 72, wherein ~~the~~ permeate sides of ~~the~~ membrane filtration means of the additional diafiltration stages are each

connected with ~~the~~ permeate outlets of the membrane filtration means of the upstream diafiltration stage by permeate pumps.

74. (Currently Amended) The filtration plant in accordance with claim 68, wherein the plant has at least one of nanofiltration, ultrafiltration[[, and/or]] and microfiltration stages upstream of the diafiltration stages.